

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A1

THE WASHINGTON POST
6 June 1982

STAT

Defector Terms Kremlin's Infighters 'Political Pygmies'

STAT

By Robert G. Kaiser
Washington Post Staff Writer

Americans should not expect the current power struggle in the Kremlin to produce either a strong new leader or significant changes in Soviet policies for at least several years after the demise of Leonid I. Brezhnev, according to the highest-ranking Soviet official ever to defect to the United States.

Arkadi N. Shevchenko, 51, who was undersecretary general of the United Nations in New York when he sought American asylum in April, 1978, also says Americans would be wrong to believe they can force concessions because of the Soviets' current economic and agricultural difficulties. In an interview with The Washington Post, the first extensive one he has given since his defection, Shevchenko said no foreseeable Soviet leadership could afford the risks that would accompany significant departures from current foreign and domestic policies.

"Nobody will succeed Brezhnev," Shevchenko said, adding that no new leader could combine the titles and powers that Brezhnev holds. Such power, he said, can only be accumulated over many years.

Shevchenko has spent many months telling U.S. officials what he knows of Soviet personalities and policies and the workings of the Soviet system, and senior officials say his information has been valuable and often unique. Shevchenko, who said American officials now make no attempt to control what he says or does in public, sought out a Washington Post reporter through a U.S. intelligence official he befriended soon after he defected.

During Shevchenko's 22 years as a Soviet diplomat he met the principal contenders for power in the post-Brezhnev era. Much of Shevchenko's access to the upper reaches of the Soviet establishment came as a result of his close ties to Andrei A. Gromyko, the Soviet foreign minister, whom he served as personal political adviser

from 1970 to 1973, before becoming the highest-ranking Soviet at the United Nations.

Unlike some Soviet defectors, Shevchenko does not portray the Soviet leaders as implacable opponents of capitalism who are hell-bent on conquering the West. Instead, he said, they are mostly second-rate men without strong personalities or distinct views who are always interested in accumulating personal power, but not if it means risking the system of rank and privilege that has served them all so well.

This does not mean that there are "moderates" or "liberals" in the Kremlin leadership, Shevchenko said, but rather that the men who run the Soviet Union are generally small-minded and cau-

"These people are political pygmies," he said.

Shevchenko said Brezhnev often has been physically incapacitated since 1976 or 1977, yielding much day-to-day power to his longtime protege, Konstantin Chernenko. During meetings in which Shevchenko took part in 1977, Brezhnev was obviously suffering from severe memory loss and disorientation, he said.

"I was shocked at his condition," Shevchenko said. Although Brezhnev continued to have moments of effectiveness and lucidity in the years since, he added, this was often "a case of a man who could not think."

Shevchenko has married an American woman and settled in an area not far from the nation's capital. He acknowledged that he is anxious to improve his image in this country, which was badly tarnished by his affair with a Washington call girl that turned into a public scandal.

Shevchenko said he was in terrible shape during the first months after he defected, drinking heavily and behaving badly with the call girl, Judy Chavez, whom he paid thousands of dollars—provided by the CIA—every month. Chavez described this period in sleazy detail in her paperback book, "Defector's Mistress."

Shevchenko's first wife died under mysterious circumstances in Moscow shortly after she was rushed back from New York when security agents discovered her husband had defected. Shevchenko charges that the Soviet security police, the KGB, murdered her. A son and a daughter from this marriage are living in the Soviet Union.

Today Shevchenko has given up drinking, and his American friends say his new wife has helped change his life. A small, stooped man with a handsome Slavic face and flowing white hair, he looks fit and talks with energy. He is working on a book about his experiences, and hopes to write and lecture here on Soviet affairs.

Shevchenko's close relationship with Gromyko gave him an intimate view of the top Soviet leaders that was unusual for a Soviet diplomat. Like other experts and specialists, diplomats are seldom allowed into the inner circle. Still, much of Shevchenko's information is secondhand, based on gossip among the cadre of experts who advise the top leaders.

Shevchenko said the advanced age of the entire ruling group has become an important political factor. He revealed that after Gromyko fainted in a meeting of the ruling Politburo in 1973, the group decided to order all its members to take one-month vacations twice each year.